City of Boca Raton Recreation Services

2020 Year in Review
Wow, what a year 2020 was! Last year, Park and Recreation month’s theme was “We Are Parks & Recreation.” It highlighted the many faces behind the industry, as well as the essential nature of our citizens’ parks, programs, and open spaces. The pandemic only served to reinforce this notion, with some areas of the Recreation Services Department never shutting down, and others being some of the first to reopen post-lockdown. Our citizens truly showed that they utilize, care about, and support the services and facilities Recreation provides, and for that we are grateful.

When we temporarily closed some areas and facilities to the public, hundreds upon hundreds of citizens reached out, yearning to return to their parks, beaches, fields, and facilities—it was heartwarming and heartbreaking all at once. Never in my 28 years of public service have I experienced this outpouring from patrons and constituents. When parks and beaches reopened to the public, they were busier than ever, as the notion of a lockdown ignited a passion for the outdoors in many. A silver lining of the past year was that so many individuals rediscovered, or even discovered, their love of nature, many visiting our parks for the first time, and taking on new recreational pursuits.

While last year was challenging, it was also affirming! In light of the pandemic, Recreation Services did not stop working—not for one day. Hopefully you’ve noticed that Boca is as beautiful as ever, with our talented Parks, Irrigation, and Beautification team keeping our medians and green spaces pristine daily. I’ve witnessed my fellow team members develop creative ways to offer services to our residents while keeping both our patrons and our team members safe. Innovative programs have been implemented including virtual camps and learning opportunities for our children. Finally, our team members have learned new skills, and many worked at new facilities, happily assuming related responsibilities. For this level of service, teamwork, and innovation, I want to thank ALL my fellow Recreation Services Team Members!

Much of what we have achieved this year has also been made possible by the support of our Boca Raton City Council, the Greater Boca Raton Beach and Park District Commissioners and their Executive Team, the Park and Recreation Board, Friends of Gumbo Limbo, Friends of the Library, and the Boca Raton Public Library Board. Thank you to all who have supported our mission, even through the tough year that was 2020!
WHO WE ARE

We roll 800 deep, with team members working around the clock to make all things recreation go 'round in the City.
WHO WE ARE

The Recreation Services Department is led by a team of professionals in their respective fields, all working tirelessly with the same goal in mind, to make Recreation in Boca Raton better every day. These are our fearless leaders.

Michael J. Kalvort, CPRE  Recreation Services Director  Michelle Zimmer, CPRP  Deputy Director
  Greg Stevens, CPRP  Superintendent  Paul Davidson, CPRP, AFO  Superintendent
  Tiffany Lucia, CPRP  Superintendent  Jill Dixon, CPRE  Financial Manager

Monika Amar, CSEP, CWP  Community Events
John Battiloro  Park Rangers
Amy Blackman, CPRP  Community Centers
Kevin Beckman, CPRP  Athletics
Kimberly Harris, AFO  Aquatics
Jim Henegar, CPRP, CYSA  Golf
Alex Keller  Parks Projects
Andrew Leganik  Parks Maintenance
Shannon Lotito  Cemetery & Mausoleum
Leslie Martorano  Tennis & Racquet Sports
Ellen Randolph, MLIS, MA  Libraries
Julian Reis  Beautification
Clint Tracy, CPRP  Ocean Rescue
Leanne Welch  Gumbo Limbo Nature Center
The mission of the Boca Raton Recreation Services Department is to enrich the life of each resident and to contribute to the enhancement of Boca Raton as a community by providing exceptional recreational, educational, and municipal programs, facilities, and sites in a fiscally responsible manner.

Even while you're sleeping, we are working to keep our City beautiful.
Recreation Services is filled with dedicated employees, working to make your every experience with us memorable and pleasant. Our department spans many diverse areas of the City, from our parks to our medians, programs for all ages, sports opportunities for beginners and pros, and everyone in between. In any given week pre-pandemic, a resident or visitor could enjoy a round of golf, a play at the Willow Theatre, take a dip in the ocean, learn to ballroom dance, and be touched by Recreation Services...
WHO WE ARE

CHILDREN’S SCIENCE EXPLORIUM
COMMUNITY EVENTS
DOWNTOWN LIBRARY
GATE ATTENDANTS
GUMBO LIMBO NATURE CENTER
IRRIGATION
JAMES A RUTHERFORD COMMUNITY CENTER
MEADOWS PARK POOL
OCEAN RESCUE
PARK RANGERS
WHO WE ARE

PARKS MAINTENANCE
PARKS PROJECTS
PATCH REEF TENNIS CENTER
RED REEF GOLF COURSE
SEA TURTLE REHAB

SPANISH RIVER LIBRARY
SUGAR SAND PARK COMMUNITY CENTER
THE RACQUET CENTER
THE SWIM CENTER
WILLLOW THEATRE
Recreation Services is comprised of 15 sections, responsible for the programming & maintenance of all things recreation.
**OUR TOP ACHIEVEMENTS**

1. **Most Loved Library**
   The Boca Raton Public Library, which includes the Downtown and Spanish River branches, was voted “Most Loved Library” in 2020 by Hulafrog, a national network of local websites for parents, highlighting the best local events and activities.

2. **Emmy Winner**
   Troubled Waters, a Turtle’s Tale, a documentary featuring Gumbo Limbo team members, premiered on WLRN (and staff were asked to participate on several panel discussions). The film later won **two regional Emmy Awards**.

3. **Shiny New Park**
   After more than 20 years in the making, Hillsboro El Rio South officially opened in February 2020. Offering recreation for the southeast portion of the City, the park has raised nearby home values by $4,959,068.

4. **Saving Lives Daily**
   While we always promote water safety, Ocean Rescue is there for beachgoers and boaters year-round. In 2020, **6000+ preventative actions** were taken, with 60 rescues, 20+ major medical first aids, and 30+ Fire Department-assisted responses.

5. **Surf’s Up, Kids**
   In Summer 2020, Surf Camp allowed for a much-needed outlet during COVID closures. 13 sessions of the program ran successfully (offering three more weeks than previous years), with **588 children participating** in total.

6. **A Viral Campaign**
   The REFUSE campaign by Gumbo Limbo Nature Center went **viral around the globe** with a Facebook post featuring a hatchling turtle that died after eating over 100 pieces of plastic. The goal of the campaign is to spread awareness of the damage single-use plastics can have on nature, and teach to people to refuse them when offered.

7. **Keep the STEAM Alive**
   Our annual citywide scavenger hunt, promoting the STEAM subjects, required a facelift this year to offer a safe alternative. In under 30 minutes we were able to distribute **200 activity bags** curbside for local children to explore at home!

8. **Five Statewide Awards**
   Community Events brought home **five awards** at the Florida Festivals and Events Association’s Annual Convention & Tradeshow, including two 1st place awards, one 2nd place, and two 3rd place, statewide in various categories.

9. **Major Increases**
   The Tim Huxhold Skate Park’s participation increased by 153% from June - September 2020, as more outdoor activities were sought-after during the pandemic.

10. **Streamlined Athletics**
    Athletics implemented an IM-league website to maintain accurate player information, track participation, and communicate more efficiently for scheduling, games scores, rainouts, standings, and playoffs. Nearly **2,000 people** have registered.
We are in the business of working together and collaborating to get the job done. From large-scale events and programs, to daily operations, we strive to offer the most efficient and effective solutions to best serve our community. Here are just a few instances of how we work together to make Boca Raton even better.

**Saving Lives Together**
In June, Ocean Rescue responded to a patron call of an injured sea turtle offshore. After alerting Gumbo Limbo, they deployed to spot, capture, & bring the turtle to GLNC’s team, who performed surgery to remove fishing hooks from the turtle’s throat & stomach.

**Navigating Safely**
With the assistance of the Boca Raton Police Department, Park Rangers were able to navigate the closures of our parks and beaches, safely and securely, during the pandemic lockdown. When the time came to reopen, BRPD was right there by our side, enabling us to serve citizens by managing traffic and enforcement for the safety of those recreating outdoors.

**Eco Initiatives**
The Ocean Rescue, Park Rangers and Park Maintenance sections, have worked with City Council, and the Sustainability and Communication Departments of the City Manager’s Office to implement and promote both a recycling pilot program and the Beach Bucket program to reduce the amount of litter on our beaches.

**Moving Day**
Gumbo Limbo Nature Center collaborated with Ocean Rescue and Risk Management on successfully transferring four large tarpon out of the shipwreck aquarium to a transport truck, which brought them to SeaWorld where they can live out their lives.
RECREATION ONLINE

This year, more than ever, our department has depended on the internet to bring information and programming to the public. From program development, to production, promotion, and implementation, our skilled "techies" have stepped up to bring another dimension to Recreation, and connect with our patrons.

Take-Home Science
The Children’s Science Explorium has brought science home with various virtual programs for all ages. Curbside STEAM and Pop Up Science allowed viewers to do experiments at home by following instructional videos created by Sugar Sand Park staff.

Athletics At Home
Our City of Boca Raton Athletics (COBRA) team pivoted to still accommodate our young athletes in the safety of their homes with the production of their well-received sports tips video series for social media. Be sure to follow “Boca Raton Recreation” to check them out!

Inspiring Young Authors
Gumbo Limbo Nature Center’s Annual Story Writing Contest went virtual this year, but still saw 26 story submissions by young authors who wrote about what GLNC’s mascot Luna has been up to during quarantine! Together with the Library section, the winners were interviewed, and the stories read aloud. This was all posted to social media, reaching nearly 200 viewers.

Digital Collection
Boca Raton Public Library worked to expand their digital collection to include more than 860,000 items. This effort works in conjunction with our department initiatives to make offerings more accessible online, for patrons to enjoy in the safety of their homes!
THE YEAR AT A GLANCE

Golden Fig Park
After the recent installation of new colorful playground equipment and surfacing at Golden Fig Park, it has become one of the most popular neighborhood parks in the City. Be sure to walk on over and check it out one day!

PlayByCourt Rollout
The Tennis Centers implemented the PlayByCourt reservation system for players to reserve court times online, in a user-friendly, paperless, and streamlined manner. This innovation is another step towards becoming more sustainable and efficient!

Field Improvements
Ballfield Maintenance worked to improve the athletic fields by laser-grading the baseball and softball fields, and adding crushed brick on warning tracks at several parks, improving playability and drainage, thus decreasing rainout calls.

Surf Camp
The Boca Raton Community Center was able to run 13 sessions of Surf Camp in 2020, accommodating nearly 600 children, despite the pandemic cancelling most camp programs in the area. They even added 3 more weeks to the program this year!

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Aquatics Passes
The Swim Center started selling monthly passes in 2020, making membership more accessible to the public. The section as a whole increased pool pass sales from last year, even though they were closed for two months at the beginning of the pandemic!

Facility Facelift
The Cemetery and Mausoleum team made many improvements to the grounds and facilities this year, including the installation of new A/C units and replacing the roof on the Rotunda Building, painting of the Administration Building, and overall landscaping.

Field Safety Check
Our Beautification team worked to improve their visibility and increase staff safety on the road, rolling out brighter colored uniforms and adding additional safety markings on all vehicles, to stand out more when pulled over on the roadways.

Pondhawk StoryWalk
The Boca Raton Public Library worked with Palm Beach County and Friends of the Library to launch a reading experience for those visiting and exploring the Pondhawk Natural Area just north of the Spanish River branch. This initiative will continue to expand with new stories bimonthly.

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OUR NUMBER ONE GOAL IS TO KEEP EVERYONE SAFE & HEALTHY.

THE YEAR OF PIVOTING

This past year has been a challenge, to say the least. The whole world has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the vast majority of in-person public programming, including classes, athletics, events, and meetings have been postponed or made virtual.

Though there are several areas of our department that never paused during the pandemic lockdown, including our Park Rangers, Parks Maintenance, Beautification, and Irrigation teams, as well as our Cemetery and Mausoleum who continued to host funeral services, we have been impacted greatly as a whole by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our department consistently maintained our parks and beaches for public use, which saw an exponential increase in public participation after the lockdown. Interest in outdoor recreation, with fresh air and open spaces, as a whole has skyrocketed. However, for the safety of our patrons and our team members, indoor recreation at our facilities has not been permitted to resume. Events, program and outdoor athletics are currently being limited by capacity or timeslots.

Additionally, our team members have engaged in new ways to work, exploring alternating shifts to limit cross-contamination when they are in-house. All of our programming from the libraries, Children’s Science Explorium at Sugar Sand Park, Gumbo Limbo Nature Center, and special events have also shifted to web-based or curbside alternatives.

At the beginning of the pandemic, parks, beaches, golf courses, aquatics facilities, and tennis facilities were closed to the public, with phased reopenings over time and the addition of new standards for health and safety throughout the City.

In the best interest of our community and team members, we have implemented various sanitization protocols and safety measures in response to the pandemic. Recreation Services team members are required to wear face coverings during their shift, while interacting with both peers and patrons, and visitors of our parks and facilities are encouraged to wear face coverings when social distancing is not possible. Each front desk of our facilities now has a plexiglass divider shield to protect both our team members and patrons, and each front desk line has floor markings designating social distancing spacing of at least six feet apart. Our department has also enhanced our sanitization processes and protocols for all touch points of our indoor facilities.

Online permit renewals and online reservations for athletic fields, tennis courts, and tee times, are all being strongly encouraged. For those recreating outdoors, we have added more time between reserved timeslots for swimming, tennis, and golf.

Boca Raton Public Library began to offer curbside holds pick-up of books, DVDs, and more to allow for a contactless alternative to browsing the shelves. Through this program, the Library has served more than 10,000 patrons.
COVID-19 required us to quickly adapt and make creative changes in order to meet the needs of the public. Utilizing the hidden skillsets of staff, we have worked to go above and beyond to adjust to the challenges of COVID-19, and create an environment for safe Recreation.

**Curbside Permit Sales**

The Community Centers section offered curbside service for the sale of beach parking, boat launch, dog park and dog beach permit sales during the pandemic starting in May. From May through September, 2,716 permits were issued curbside.

**Virtual Events**

Community Events hosts 100,000 attendees annually at their events. In 2020, for the health and safety of patrons and staff, the signature holiday events were converted to a virtual format, inclusive of a Memorial Day Ceremony and a week-long 4th of July celebration. SpringFest became a Virtual Egg Hunt, and we hosted a virtual Father's Day fishing derby.

**Improved Sanitation**

Though cleanliness has always been a priority for our department, the pandemic shed light on the importance of frequently sanitizing touch points and protecting both staff and patrons with masks, plexi shields, social distancing cues, and gloves.

**Virtual Programs**

Our department as a whole has produced more than 200 virtual programs, camps and events from the start of the pandemic, reaching more than 20,000 viewers, offering both children and adults a safe, and socially distanced outlet for learning and recreating in the safety of their homes.
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**How We Adapted**

**Improved Marketing**
As the times have changed, we have put more value on online marketing via social media and the City’s website. We have seen an increase in followers and viewership, showing us that patrons are seeking information online regarding our department.

**Staggered Timeslots**
To allow for more time for cleaning between patrons, and to decrease interaction between groups of those recreating outdoors at our parks and facilities, staff has added more time between reserved timeslots for swimming, tennis, and golf.

**Activity Bags**
Camp Boca, JARCC, the Children’s Science Explorium, Gumbo Limbo, the Boca Raton Public Library, and Community Events distributed more than 1,000 curbside pickup activity bags for children in 2020, to engage with and educate young patrons from a distance. Many of these bags have also been accompanied by virtual programs.

**Contactless Recreation**
Beyond online reservations becoming readily available for many of our outdoor activities for less face-to-face interactions, we have also implemented various innovations to avoid unnecessary touching and potential contamination of objects, including the E-Z Lyft at the golf courses.
WHY WE DO IT

We couldn't do what we do without YOU!
"Although it has changed quite a bit of late, interaction with parents and players is the best part of the job. I love the instruction to players that leads to growth and development in youth sports. The relationships we build with families are extremely rewarding."

-- JIM THOMAS
Athletic Supervisor

"I love my job because I get to welcome new Boca residents and introduce them to the city parks and beaches. I enjoy informing new Boca residents about the different beaches, programs, playgrounds and parks. I know I've done a good job when a resident leaves with their new beach permit more confident and informed."

-- COLLEEN LONGAZEL
Secretary

"We are always learning new things and building a great team together. I also enjoy the weather 90% of the time (since I work outdoors) and meeting new people from all over. What a beautiful city!"

-- ALLEN JENKINS
Cemetery Caretaker

"I love my job for several reasons, starting with the pride that I get knowing how hard all my co-workers work to keep our beaches, parks and playgrounds safe, clean and beautiful. I continually get compliments from my friends, neighbors and family members for their love of our beaches, parks & playgrounds, which makes me proud."

-- LEEANN CARPENTER
Parks Secretary

"The most enjoyable part of my job is giving information about the parks and Boca Raton in general. I have lived here for 30 years, and I love sharing with patrons the many attributes the city has to offer. I love our motto: A City Within a Park. As far as I'm concerned, our parks are the best in the world, and I love coming to work early and enjoying nature before I start my shift."

-- MARILYN J. CAWTHORNE
Gate Attendant

"The day I went for my first interview 14 years ago, I entered the emerald green city from I-95 for the first time and smiled. Although my job is dirty and hard work, it is also rewarding. That memory hasn't faded. I love knowing that what I do each day may give a future coworker and even new residents, the same feeling."

-- JAMES ROWLAND
Irrigation Electrician
"I have been a member at Boca Raton Tennis Center for many years. It’s like a second home. The center is very clean, organized, and a vast improvement as well in court quality. The staff is customer friendly. If I have a question, the staff is always available to help. If they don’t know the answer, they will try to find it."
- Susan

"The City’s pickleball courts are fantastic."
- Jennifer

"Thank you for being faithful and committed to your jobs! I know that without you here, I wouldn’t be able to enjoy the respite our parks provide." (He walks them EVERY DAY!)
- Roger

“What a beautiful course and such a professional staff. We were very impressed with the precautions taken to keep everyone safe. The staff couldn’t have made our experience (the first since the pandemic closed everything down) more pleasant. We will be returning again and again and we will recommend Red Reef to all of our friends.”
- Andria

"Thank you for being faithful and committed to your jobs! I know that without you here, I wouldn’t be able to enjoy the respite our parks provide."
- Anonymous

"The beach and pool lifeguards do an outstanding job! Thank you..."
- Michael

"The beach and pool lifeguards do an outstanding job! Thank you..."
- Tom

"Thank you for keeping us safe and keeping us going with your fantastic offerings of virtual programs!"
- Caitlin

"Thank you for keeping us safe and keeping us going with your fantastic offerings of virtual programs!"
- Andria

"The City’s pickleball courts are fantastic.”
- Jennifer

We Do It All For You!
WHERE WE'RE GOING

We see a brighter future on the horizon for us all! We will always work to improve our offerings to the City of Boca Raton.
A New & Improved Waterfront Park
Wildflower Park is undergoing long-awaited renovations to improve the amenities it offers as a waterfront park. The project will include a new seawall, non-motorized vessel launch, pedestrian promenade, water features, and more. The project is estimated to take nine months to complete, with a projected opening in late-2021.

Boca Raton Golf & Tennis Club
The City of Boca Raton recently accepted the generous donation of the Boca Country Club, which Recreation Services plans to absorb management of in late 2021. We are looking forward to operating the prestigious 18-hole golf course and more in the months and years to come!

Sustainability Initiatives
We have just skimmed the surface of our sustainability goals, as we work to become more eco-conscious in the coming years. Our recycling initiatives will continue to be implemented at our parks and beaches, and plans are underway to move towards a mandate against single-use plastics and balloons at city events.

More Pickleball
Construction is already underway to expand the City’s pickleball offerings to the public, with six new courts at Patch Reef Park Tennis Center. After the successful opening of the courts at the new Hillsboro El Rio Park South, this sport has grown in popularity, and the demand for more is high!
We are so excited for what is to come for the City of Boca Raton’s Recreation Services Department! We appreciate all those who have supported us year after year, and look forward to inviting new patrons to enjoy our parks, beaches, and facilities!

There is light on the horizon after the past year took us on an unprecedented rollercoaster. All we can hope, after the pandemic has passed, is that we come out of this stronger, more mindful of ourselves and others, more creative and adaptable in challenging times, and more grateful for all the good things in life we may have previously taken for granted, like gathering along Federal Highway to watch the Holiday Street Parade, or taking an in-person class at the Boca Raton Community Center.

We cannot wait to invite you back to enjoy our spaces fully, but in the meantime we are working to improve ourselves to bring you the best possible recreation experiences in the future. Following the completion of the Needs Assessment and surveying our residents, we will continue to strive to enhance our offerings in the coming years to match the needs of our community. We aim to grow consistently for the betterment of our residents’ lifestyle.

There are many projects for improvement currently underway, like those in Wildflower Park, and with the completion of the design requirements for the Sand Pine Park, Pine Breeze Park, and Lake Wyman/Rutherford Park renovations as well as the Hughes Park Playground enhancements, this is just the tip of the iceberg of our goals to make our Boca Raton parks esteemed throughout Florida.

We hope in the months and years ahead—especially when the pandemic is behind us—you’ll patronize our parks, beaches, facilities, events, and programs, and offer us feedback on how we could be better. We will always aim to provide our patrons with safe and enjoyable recreation experiences, and to grow and diversify our offerings with each passing year, but we can only do this with your help and support. Be sure to follow us on social media to stay up to date with the latest in Boca Raton Recreation. We look forward to seeing your smiling faces again soon!